Brandy Creek Falls Trail

Brandy Creek Falls

FEATURES

Difficulty Level: Moderate
Length: 1.5 miles one way
Elevation: 2,000 to 2,500 feet
Lovely fern dells, waterfalls and creek crossings
This trail connects to the Rich Gulch Trail

TRAILHEAD DIRECTIONS

Starting at the Whiskeytown Visitor Center, drive south on Kennedy Memorial Drive towards Whiskeytown Dam. The road forks. Continue on the right fork, crossing over the dam. The paved road winds around the lake to the Brandy Creek Beach area.

Turn left on Shasta Bally Road which becomes a dirt road. Drive up the road approximately 2.5 miles towards Sheep Camp. Turn left at the junction of the road to Sheep Camp/Shasta Bally The left fork leads to the Brandy Creek Falls trailhead.

After approximately 0.75 mile, look to the right for a small parking area.

The trailhead is up the road, look for the sign, approximately 150 feet distant.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION

This is a moderately steep trail leading uphill to the base of Brandy Creek Falls. The trail is mostly an old logging road.

Approximately 0.5 mile into the hike you will cross one of two small creeks on the trail. The natural debris of large boulders and logs found at the creek crossing came from a dramatic debris flow that came thundering down the mountain during the winter of 1997.

Approximately 0.75 mile into the hike is the Rich Gulch Trail, on the left. Pass this trail to reach the falls. From this point on the trail narrows; horses and bicycles are not recommended.

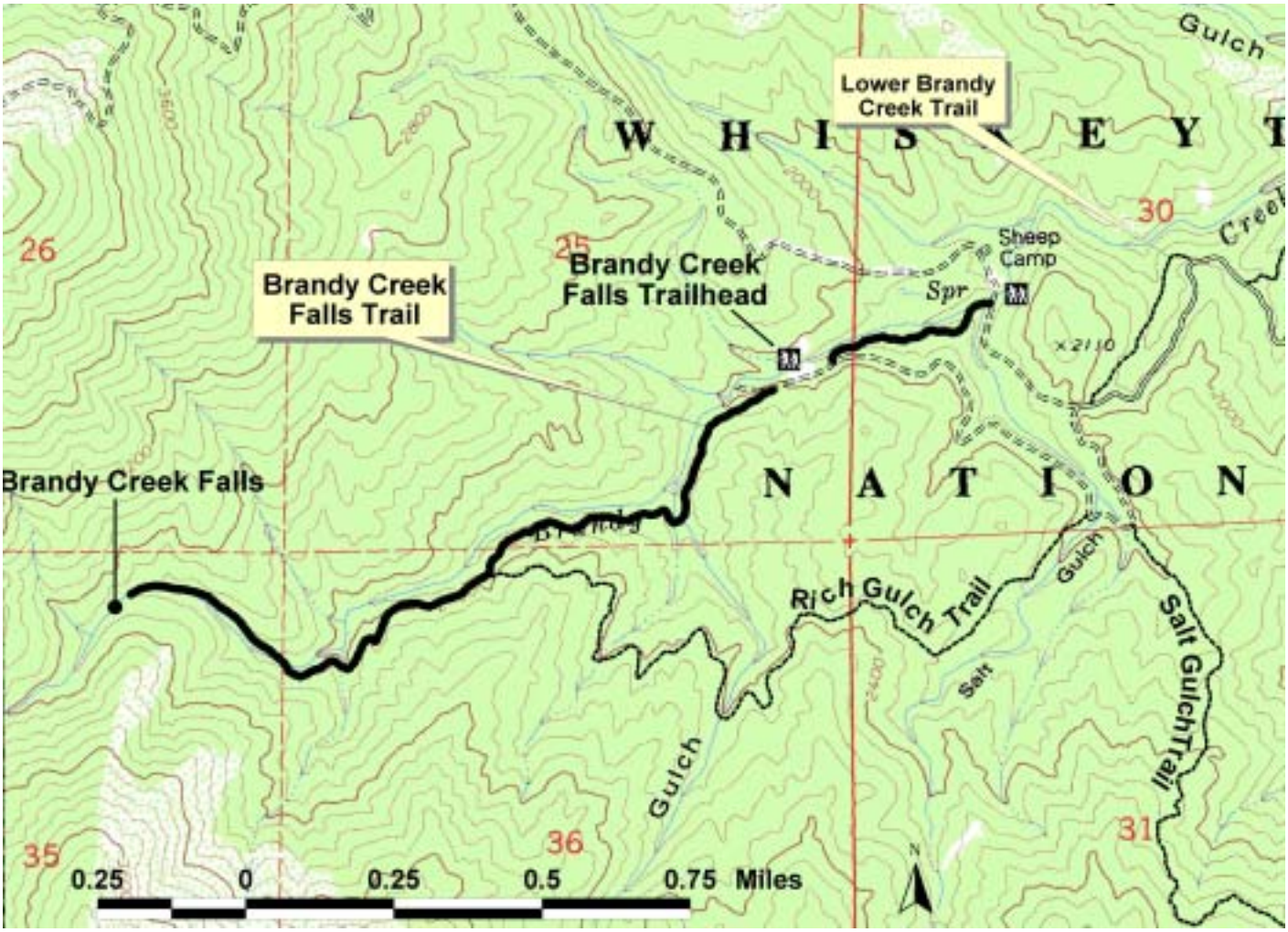
Look for the American dipper and great blue herons feeding on small fish and insects near the falls.

The Brandy Creek trail takes the hiker into moist fern dells and along steep trail edges. The trail looks down into the dense second growth forest typical of this section of the park. From the first cascade at the lower falls, the trail enters a narrow box canyon. Beautiful pools connected by fast moving riffles cascade across large slabs of bedrock guideing the hiker up to the falls. Use the footholds chiseled out of the rock and the railings to assist the climb past five pools and cascades to the falls. In the summer, the falls split in the middle, creating two falls that flow on either side of this 50 foot high waterfall. Enjoy the majesty of one of nature's creations.

FLORA

Tanoak leaves

The trail is populated with large ponderosa pine, black oak, canyon live oak, incense cedar, big leaf maple, and Douglas fir. The understory consists of dogwood, California pipevine, snowberry, bracken and sword ferns. Tanoak, with their light gray splotchy trunks, are especially abundant on this trail. Also, look for an intricate, curled feathery moss called Dendroalsia abietina *that grows on some of the tree trunks. It is partial to the hardwoods (oaks and maples) and is seldom seen on conifers. At the first creek vista look for gray and white layered rocks across the stream. These are called amphibolite (see geology section). An unusually large red-barked madrone tree graces the near bank.*



GEOLOGY

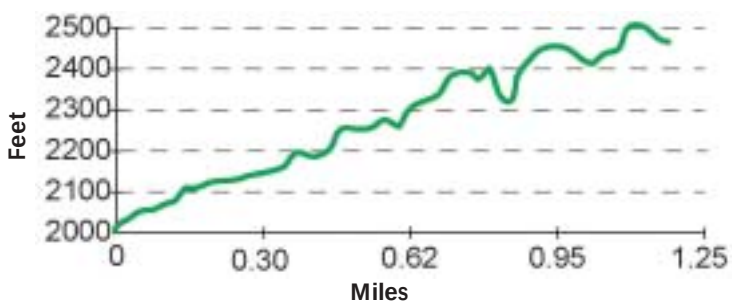
About 400 million years ago a magma chamber under the Pacific tectonic plate welled up and began expelling hot rock into the seabed covering it. Over time, the mounded basalt rose above the surface and created a string of islands.

In the next 10-30 million years, the Pacific plate collided with and partly slipped under the North American continental plate, parking this island arc against the mainland. Since then it has undergone many compressive folds and fractures; but this is the greatly simplified story of the base rock of the Brandy Creek Trail. The rock is called Copley Greenstone and one theory holds that the remnant of its parent magma chamber is the Mule Mountain stock.

Some 250 million years later, after additional island arcs were similarly shoved against the continental plate, another magma chamber pushed through the greenstone. This was the Shasta Bally Batholith which generated heat and pressure during this uplift, baking some of the native rock into colorful amphibolite, visible in places along the trail. Periodically, debris flows of boulders and mud wash down from Shasta Bally spottily covering the surrounding greenstone.

Batholith rock contains high levels of biotite (mica) and easily fractures into decomposed granite (DG) covering the trail in many places. Brandy Creek cuts through this mixed bed of Bally debris and greenstone.

The base rock of Brandy Creek is Copley Greenstone, primarily basalt formed by shallow underwater volcanism about 400 million years ago.



Elevation Profile

SAFETY

Steep slopes and edges are found along the trail. Be sure to assist children along steeps slopes and across slippery rocks. Do not try to cross Brandy Creek above any of the cascades unless aided by one of the two footbridges. Stay on the trail at all times.